

ADAPTABILITY IN SPECIES

In wandering through the zoological garden one is reminded of the old song beginning "Oh Pilgrim from the Indies; Oh Guest from out the North" for in many of the enclosures can be seen living contentedly side by side guests from these antipodes. The strange thing about the situation is that in the semi-tropical climate of San Diego creatures brought from the hottest tropics and the icebound north seem to fare equally well so far as physical well being and comfort is concerned with the native fauna, in fact they frequently become reconciled to their captivity more rapidly for perhaps realizing that their chances for life if they did escape would be very small in such different surroundings, they adapt themselves perfectly to their artificial conditions.

This is perhaps best illustrated in the bear group. The Kadiak Bear from Alaska and the Polars from Norway representing the one extreme, and the Malay Sun bears and the Hymalayan the other, are just as healthy, comfortable and contented as the California Black bear or the Cinnamon from our own latitude. This condition is of course largely a matter of diet, the tropical animals being fattened a little to ward off the cold and the diet of the northern animals being confined more largely to what would be their natural summer feed in the wild state, fruit and vegetables.

Much false pity is bestowed upon the Polars especially because the public does not see large blocks of ice floating in their pool, nor is their grotto equipped with a refrigerating plant to supply artificial cold. The truth of the matter is that there is no animal which if properly handled adjusts itself more quickly to the climatic changes than the polar bear. The heat of the eastern summer does not interfere with their health in the least and eastern zoos have been successful in breeding them for the past few years. The zoos which have tried the use of ice and refrigerating plants have lost their bears during the first summer with pneumonia or colds because becoming overheated in their play they jump into icy water and are too suddenly chilled. Animals are subject to the same reactions that humans enjoy and it is common knowledge that a tepid bath will reduce the temperature of the body more effectively than the cold shower which stimulates greater circulation of the blood. Hence the pool of the temperature of the air is the best equipment for winter and summer. The polar bears spend as much time in the water in the winter as they do in the summer and although it may send chills to the marrow of your bones to see them splash into the pool on a morning when the temperature stands about forty, they enjoy it just as much as they seem to when the heat makes you almost willing to try it with them. The only other bears which ever use the pool except for drinking purposes are the Kadiak and Hymalayan, the former spending much time just lying in the water.

In addition to the careful feeding to assist in the climatic adjustments, the bears themselves take care of this condition by extra heavy shedding during the late spring to prepare them for the heat of the summer.